

GUEST COMMENTARY

The CIA And The Green Berets: A Strange Case Of Mistaken Identities?

By L. FLETCHER PROUTY

SECRETARY OF THE ARMY Stanley R. Resor, has announced that he has dropped the charges against all eight U.S. Army Special Forces "Green Beret" soldiers in Vietnam.

His statement has come as quite a surprise.

But not so long ago the Navy was faced with the same problem, and it quietly dropped charges threatened against Commander Bucher and the crew of the ill-fated spy ship PUEBLO.

There is a strong parallel that shows what's really at issue.

At the time of the PUEBLO inquiry the Director of Central Intelligence announced in a letter to Senator Stuart Symington (D-Mo) that the CIA was not involved in the PUEBLO affair. Similarly, it has been reported, VAdm William F. Raborn, former CIA Director and onetime Patriarch of the Polaris submarine fleet, has said that CIA had nothing to do with the Green Beret case.

Taken in limited and specific context, both of these statements are unquestionably true. However, the PUEBLO—at the time of its capture—was sailing under the operational control of another highly classified government agency (not the CIA). As a result, the Navy was unable to press charges

against the PUEBLO Captain and crew—not only because the PUEBLO was not then under Navy control, but also because so many of the crew were *not* bona fide Navy personnel.

In Vietnam, the Green Berets of the Special Forces were under the *operational* control of the CIA and, in spite of Secretary Resor's protestation that the CIA would not make witnesses available in connection with the pending trials, that may not be the real problem. The Army is having to face up to the fact that, since it had relinquished operational control of the Special Forces involved, it no longer had legal grounds for pressing formal military charges against them. In brief, the CIA may not have had anything to do with the "case"—the alleged murder; but it was involved, as it has been for years, with the operational activities of that Special Forces unit.

To the uninitiated, this may sound like splitting hairs over an insignificant point. But to those who have watched the growth of Special Forces while their activities came increasingly under the operational control of CIA, it is a most basic and crucial one. It may well turn out, when more of the facts are uncovered, that more than half of these U. S. Army Special Forces soldiers were *not* U. S. Army personnel at all. If a number of these men were not in fact bona fide officers and enlisted men of the U. S. Army, it would be extremely unlikely that any court, military and civilian, would grant the Army the authority to court martial and try them, even under the circumstances which the Army alleged to have taken place.

What it all boils down to is that five of the "Green Berets" weren't.

Those men who *are* bona fide military personnel will be reassigned: they may, at a time and place of their own choosing, remain on duty, or resign from the Service to pursue other interests. Those who are *not* members of the Army will also be reassigned (as if they were real military men) to await the day when they can again pursue their other careers with the CIA (or whatever their parent organization is).



1LT JOHN B. SALTER, Psychological Warfare Officer, Det A 236, checks .30 cal. machine gun field of fire from a bunker at Camp Bu Prang.

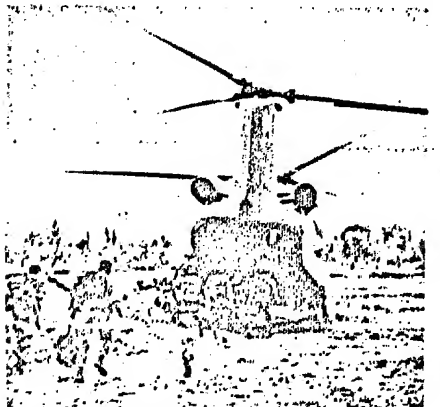
But this most recent development in the Green Beret case—this announcement by Secretary Resor—still leaves unsettled several major issues: one of them of immediate importance to MACV Commander General Creighton Abrams in Vietnam. It is most likely that, if the General and his staff had known last July what they now know about all of these men, they would have taken other measures from the outset. But one thing is certain. General Abrams, unlike his predecessors, is not going to accept the continuation of this kind of a "cover-story" Army in his Command. It's hard enough to maintain the morale and spirit of a large fighting force when it is actively and energetically engaged with the enemy; but during a period of peace negotiations and disengagement, maintenance of morale and military effectiveness becomes an unenviable task. It's virtually an impossible one when a large part of the "command" turns out to work for someone outside the system.

Already there have been cases of near-mutiny and deep unrest in certain units of General Abrams' command; the unpopular and generally degrading episode of this Green Beret affair will not help matters. It is to be expected that we shall see the departure of the Special Forces units, as we now know them, from South Vietnam. If General Abrams' superiors feel as he does and back him up in the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the National Security Council, we may eventually see the Special Forces organized out of the Army (just as their original counterpart forces were dropped by the Air Force many years ago).

This still leaves two important matters to be settled in Washington. Secretary Resor's statement ended the trial in Vietnam before it started; but it does not clear up the question of responsibility for a brutal murder.

Either a murder was committed, or it was not. Either someone is guilty, or he is not. The facts have not changed simply because the CIA decides that its

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CIVILIAN IRREGULAR DEFENSE members board a Chinook helicopter on mission from 5th Special Forces Camp in Vietnam.